

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 300

28 June 1950

SUBJECT: The USSR and the Korean Invasion

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The invasion of the Republic of Korea by the North Korean Army was undoubtedly undertaken at Soviet direction and Soviet material support is unquestionably being provided. The Soviet objective was the elimination of the last remaining anti-Communist bridgehead on the mainland of northern Asia, thereby undermining the position of the US and the Western Powers throughout the Far East. By choosing Korea as the area of attack, the USSR was able to challenge the US specifically and test the firmness of US resistance to Communist expansion.

North Korea has possessed the capabilities for attacking South Korea for some time, and the USSR has probably been making plans for such an attack ever since the withdrawal of US forces from Korea in 1949. This withdrawal and subsequent US policy probably led the Kremlin to believe that the US had abandoned any intention of giving effective military support to South Korea and that North Korean aggression could be undertaken with only a slight risk of US intervention. The USSR probably further estimated that, even in the event of such intervention, it could readily disclaim or otherwise localize the conflict.

The timing of the invasion was probably determined primarily by such recent indications of increased US interest in the Far East as the development of a policy for economic and military aid for Southeast Asia.

The prompt US reaction in ordering air and naval support of South Korea has probably exceeded Soviet expectations, and the USSR is now faced with a strong possibility of global war if it supports the North Korean invasion sufficiently to overcome combined US and South Korean resistance. It is still estimated that the USSR is not yet prepared to risk full-scale war with the Western Powers, and it is expected, therefore, that the USSR will seek to localize the Korean conflict. The USSR can achieve this result by publicly disclaiming any responsibility for the invasion and: (1) secretly ordering a North Korean withdrawal to the 38th Parallel and cessation of hostilities; (2) permitting the North Korean forces to be driven back to the 38th Parallel, but probably continuing sufficient aid to maintain that position; or (3) providing support to North Korea short of open participation by Soviet forces in an attempt to perpetuate the civil war and maintain North Korean positions south of the 38th Parallel. Because of the advantages of continuing civil

Note: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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and military disorder in Korea, the USSR will probably adopt the third alternative. In the probable event that this attempt proves impossible, the situation might well develop into indecisive and intermittent hostilities stabilized at approximately the 38th Parallel. Meanwhile, the USSR will continue to provide substantial material aid to the North Koreans, including irregulars recruited from Chinese Communists and Soviet forces.

Although the USSR has for some time been considering the advisability of aggressive moves in other areas of the world, there is no conclusive evidence to indicate the exact nature or timing of the moves being contemplated. Southeast Asia (particularly Indochina), Iran, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Berlin offer the USSR the greatest opportunities for aggressive moves or increased pressure. For example, there is continuing evidence of military preparations in the Balkans aimed at either Yugoslavia or Greece and several reports have indicated that the Korean invasion was designed, in part, as a diversionary action to cover an attack on Formosa.

In view of the vigorous US reaction to the Korean situation, however, it is not likely that the USSR will instigate surprise moves in any of these areas until the Kremlin has had an opportunity to study the implications of this reaction, particularly as to its effects on the possibility of global warfare in the event of Soviet-inspired outbreaks elsewhere. Nevertheless, Communist activity in the Far East and elsewhere will continue and will probably be intensified, but greater care will be taken to maintain the fiction that it is "indigenous."

Meanwhile, the USSR has reacted to the strong UN resolutions on the North Korean invasion by branding all action taken thus far by the Security Council as illegal and hence not binding. The attack itself indicated continued Soviet indifference to ending the boycott of the UN and the tempo of non-Soviet members of the UN will in turn make it far more difficult for the USSR to return.

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